The sweetly writhing female form he had imagined taking under the star filled sky had been transformed into Spock's hot, hard body straining beneath his--a Spock somehow not his master, but a rebel companion. An impossible thought, and dangerous; he pushed it from his mind.

At least he could still feel desire, he thought as he climbed from the bath and reached for the towel. Under the perfume of the herbs the scent of the Vulcan's body still lingered on the damp cloth. Perhaps he should be grateful he still had that. But it was not gratitude he felt as he lay sleepless at Spock's side through the long night.

Shortly after the incident with Savak, Spock found himself forced to re-evaluate his estimation of his slave's intelligence. Vulcans were fond of a very complex board game known as Warlord, in which the opponents strove to win men to their war bands, then fought mock battles in which skill, courage and daring defeated the rival. He and Satak passed many evenings in consideration of their moves, and at those times Spock liked to have Kirk curl up at his feet. It was curiously pleasant to reach down and stroke the soft hair, as he might have petted a favorite hunting cat.

What Kirk thought about as he sat there the Vulcan did not consider, supposing vaguely that the Human dreamed of his past life, until one afternoon when he returned from weapons practice to find his slave kneeling beside the table, studying the board with rapt attention.

Kirk's face was intent. He had not seen his master come in, and Spock halted, wondering with mild amusement what he was doing. To his surprise Kirk reached out, moved one of the pieces, then sat back on his heels smiling in satisfaction.

Intrigued, Spock moved closer. It had been his move, and Satak had left him with a fiendishly difficult situation. Kirk had made exactly the right move, one that at the same time removed the threat and carried the attack to his opponent.

"How did you do that?"

At the sound of his master's voice Kirk flushed crimson, then turned pale and lowered his head. "Forgive me, my lord. I meant no harm. I would have replaced the piece...."

"I am not angry," Spock assured him. "Just tell me how you knew what to do."

"The game is similar to one I played at home. I was considered quite good," Kirk said shyly. "Some of the moves are different, the winning of extra men, for example, but I watched you and Lord Satak play. When I saw the problem, I was interested and wondered if I could solve it."

"And you did, with a move worthy of a master. Astonishing!"

Kirk looked up, his eyes bright with resentment. "Only because you think of me as a clever pet, a semi-intelligent barbarian!" he said bitterly. "I'm not. I'm...." He broke off appalled, realizing that his words and tone could be considered insolent.

"Go on," Spock said quietly. "I give you permission to speak. What are you, James Kirk?"

"I'm a man," Kirk said more calmly. "Oh, I don't have Vulcan strength and stamina. It seems I'm considered...desirable by Vulcan males...but I <u>am</u> a man." He indicated the tent. "Compared to Savak you've been kind to me, treated me well--but because I'm looked on a some sort of delicate, exotic fancy, you've kept me imprisoned in this tent. I want--I <u>need</u>--the open air sometimes, the freedom to run--to exercise my body and my mind. I need companionship, someone to talk to who'll listen to me, who'll take me seriously. I used to talk to my dog the way you talk to me."

"I had not thought--" With an abrupt gesture Spock cleared the game board and reset the pieces. "Come, show me what you can do."

Lacking a Vulcan's knowledge of warrior ranks, Kirk was a little confused as to the powers of the various game characters, which gave Spock considerable advantage. That could be easily remedied, though, and the Vulcan conceded that with practice his slave would prove a formidable opponent.

They talked late that night, and Spock found that Kirk had a keen, incisive mind that matched his own. He was as intelligent as he was beautiful, not merely the expensive toy he had seemed. Spock retired for the night feeling rather shaken by his discovery, and as the Human joined him in bed, he studied his body carefully for the first time since he had acknowledged his beauty before Selon's tent. Kirk had put on a little weight due to his enforced idleness, but his flesh was firm and well muscled.

Reaching a decision, Spock sat up. "James, we must talk further. There are some things you should know about my world." Kirk sat up, hugging his knees, listening intently as the Vulcan spoke.

There were, Spock told him, many inhabited worlds, but only one race possessed the ability to travel among them. Traders by nature, the Orions chose to use their powers for profit rather than military conquest, which did not interest them. Instead they took from each world its most useful resource, giving in exchange whatever commodity its inhabitants found of greatest value--in the case of Vulcan, slaves. From the far-off world of Andor came the blue-skinned people who were greatly prized as scribes and confidential stewards. The Shahasi were sought after as artists, musicians and craftsmen, for the warlike Vulcans had a great appreciation of beauty. The unprepossessing but powerful Tellerites were purchased for heavy manual labor, and the small, coppery Vulcanoid Pavan became general work slaves. The most attractive of these often shared their masters' beds, but most prized of all were the Humans. The carefully chosen Human males were more attractive to the Vulcans than the Pavan, and were more responsive than the Shahasi. Because of their rarity they were too highly valued to be exposed to any risk, and so it was the custom to cherish and protect them. It had become accepted that they were delicate, which had made Savak's behavior so unusual. Spock had shared the common belief and only Kirk's spirited outburst led him to question it now.

"What did you do before you were enslaved, James? I know little about you as yet."

"I was a pilot. My people had begun to take their first steps toward space flight, but there was a war--we called it the Eugenics war--brought about by the attempt of certain scientists to breed a super-race. They failed, but the conflict was long and bloody. There was much destruction and much knowledge lost. We rebuilt our world, retraced the steps of the early pioneers. I was a pilot in the new space program. I'd made several moon landings and was in line for the Martian expedition. It had all had been done before, of course, but we had to learn all over again."